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CHAPTER III.

OF THE PERSONS OF THE ABIPONES, AND THE CONFORMATION OF THEIR BODIES.

142 THE Abipones are well formed, and have handsome faces, much like those of Europeans, except in point of colour, which, though not entirely white, has nothing of the blackness of Negroes and Mulattoes. For that natural whiteness which they have in infancy is somewhat destroyed as they grow up, by the sun, and by the smoke: as nearly the whole of their lives is passed in riding about plains exposed to the beams of the sun, and the short time that they spend in their tents, they keep up a fire on the ground day and night, by the heat and smoke of which they are unavoidably somewhat darkened. Whenever the cold south wind blows, [513] they move the fire to the bed, or place it underneath the hanging net in which they lie, and are thus gradually smoke-dried, like a gammon of bacon in a chimney. The women, when they 142 293 832 ride out into the country, shield their faces from the sun's rays with an umbrella, and are, in consequence, generally fairer than the men, who, more ambitious to be dreaded by their

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enemies than to be loved, to terrify than attract beholders, think the more they are scarred and sun-burnt, the handsomer they are.

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I observed that almost all the Abipones had black but rather small eyes; yet they see more acutely with them, than we do with our larger ones; being able clearly to distinguish such minute, or distant objects as would escape the eye of the most quick-sighted European. Frequently, in travelling, when we saw some animal running at a distance, and were unable to distinguish what it was, an Abipon would declare, without hesitation, whether it was a horse or a mule, and whether the colour was black, white, or grey; and on examining the object more closely, we always found him correct.

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Moreover, in symmetry of shape, the Abipones yield to no other nation of America. I scarce remember to have seen one of them with a nose like what we see in the generality of Negroes, flat, crooked, turned up towards the forehead, or broader than it should be. The commonest shape is aquiline; as long and sharp as is consistent with beauty. An hundred deformities and blemishes, common among Europeans, are foreign to them. You never see an Abipon with a hump on his back, a wen, a hare lip, a monstrous belly, bandy legs, club feet, or

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732 an impediment in his speech. They have white teeth, almost all of which they generally carry to the grave quite sound. Paraguay sometimes [136] produces dwarf horses, but never a dwarf Abipon, or any other Indian. Certain it is, that out of so many thousands of Indians, I never saw an individual of that description. Almost ●142 all the Abipones are so tall, that they might be enlisted amongst the Austrian musketeers.

The Abipones, as I told you before, are destitute of beard, and have perfectly smooth chins like all the other Indians, both of whose parents are Americans. If you see an Indian with a little beard, you may conclude, without hesitation, that one of his parents, or at any rate his grandfather, must have been of European extraction. I do not deny that a kind of down grows on the chins of the Americans, just as in sandy sterile fields, a straggling ear of corn is seen here and there; but even this they pull up by the roots whenever it grows. The office of [305] barber is performed by an old woman, who sits 302 on the ground by the fire, takes the head of the Abipon into her lap, sprinkles and rubs his face plentifully with hot ashes, which serve instead of soap, and then, with a pair of elastic horn tweezers, carefully plucks up all the hairs; which operation the savages declare to be devoid of pain, and that I might give the more credit to his

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A 302 [142 82] All the Abipones have thick, RAVEN-black locks; a child born with red or flaxen hair would be looked upon as a monster amongst them. The manner of dressing the hair differs in different nations, times, and conditions. The Abipones, previously to their entering colonies, shaved their hair like monks, leaving nothing M [303] but a circle of hair round the head. But the women of the Mbaya nation, after shaving the rest of their heads, leave some hairs untouched, to grow like the crest of a helmet, from the forehead to the crown. As the savages have M [413] neither razors nor scissars, they use a shell M. [237] sharpened against a stone, or the jaws of the fish palometa, for the purpose of shaving. Most of the Abipones in our colonies let their hair grow long, and twist it into a rope like European soldiers. The same fashion was adopted by the women, but with this difference, that they tie the braid of hair with a little piece of white cotton, as our countrymen do with black. A [765] At church, and in mournings for the dead, they scatter their hair about their shoulders. Gu 302 The Guarany Indians, on the contrary, whilst they live in the woods, without the knowledge GU [177] of religion, let their hair hang down their backs: now that they have embraced Christianity, and entered various colonies, they crop it like priests. But the women of the Guarany towns wear their hair long, platted, and bound with a

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piece of white cotton, both in and out of doors, but dishevelled and flowing when they attend divine service. The Spanish peasantry also approach the door of the church with their hair tied in the military fashion, but loosen it on entering. Indeed, all the Americans are persuaded that this is a mark of reverence due to the sacred edifice.

As soon as they wake in the morning, the Abiponian women, sitting on the ground, dress, twist, and tie their husbands' hair. A bundle of boar's bristles, or of hairs out of a tamandua's tail, serves them for a comb. You very seldom see an Indian with natural, never with artificial curling hair. They do not grow grey till very late, and then not unless they are decrepid; very few of them get bald. It is worth while to mention a ridiculous custom of the Abipones, Mocobios, Tobas, &c. all of whom, without distinction of age or sex, pluck up the hair from the forehead to the crown of the head, so that the fore part of the head is bald almost for the space of two inches: this baldness they call *nalemťa*, and account a religious mark of their nation. New-born infants have the hair of the fore part of their head cut off by a male or female juggler, these knaves performing the offices both of physicians and priests amongst them. This custom seems to me to have

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frequent rain. In sailing to Paraguay we were detained in that neighbourhood by a continuous calm, and remained stationary there for full three weeks, roasted by the heat of the sun, and daily washed with warm showers. Who can wonder that this languishing climate produces languid and weakly bodies, though strong robust people are found in other parts of Africa? From this you may know what to think of so extensive a region as America, and of its inhabitants. Its various provinces and even different parts of the provinces differ essentially in the properties of the air, food, and habitations, which produces a variety in the constitutions of the inhabitants, some being weak, some very strong.

Let others write of the other Americans to whom and what they choose: I shall not contradict them. Of the Paraguayrians I confidently affirm that the equestrian nations greatly excel the pedestrians in beauty of form, loftiness of stature, strength, health, and longevity. 142 The bodies of the Abipones are muscular, robust, agile, and extremely tolerant of the inclemencies of the sky. You scarcely ever see a fat or [526] pot-bellied person amongst them. Daily exercise in riding, hunting, and in sportive and serious contests prevents them almost always from growing fat, for like apes they are always in 164 motion. They consequently enjoy such an

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saddles used by the women are the same as those of the men, except that the former, more studious of external elegance, have theirs made of the skin of a white cow. When an Abiponian woman wants to mount her horse, she throws herself up to the middle upon its neck, like men in Europe, and then separating her feet on both sides, places herself in the saddle, which has no cushion; nor does the hardness of it offend her in journeys of many days; from which you may perceive that the skin of the Abipones is harder than leather, being rendered callous by their constantly riding without a cushion. Indians who ride much and long without saddles, frequently hurt and wound the horse's back, without receiving any injury themselves. I will now describe their manner of travelling when they remove from one place to another. The wife, besides her husband's bow and quiver, carries all the domestic furniture, all the pots, gourds, jugs, shells, balls of woollen and linen thread, weaving instruments, &c. These things are contained in boar-skin bags, suspended here and there from the saddle; where she also places the whelps, and her young infant if she have one. Besides these things, she suspends from the sides of the saddle a large mat, with two poles, to fix a tent wherever they like, and a bull's hide to serve for a boat in crossing rivers.